

Is My Team Plowing  
by A.E. Housman

"Is my team plowing,  
That I was used to drive  
And hear the harness jingle  
When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,  
The harness jingles now;  
No change though you lie under  
The land you used to plow.

"Is football playing  
Along the river shore,  
With lads to chase the leather,  
Now I stand up no more?"

Ay, the ball is flying,  
The lads play heart and soul;  
The goal stands up, the keeper  
Stands up to keep the goal.

"Is my girl happy,  
That I thought hard to leave,  
And has she tired of weeping  
As she lies down at eve?"

Ay, she lies down lightly,  
She lies not down to weep:  
Your girl is well contented.  
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

"Is my friend hearty,  
Now I am thin and pine,  
And has he found to sleep in  
A better bed than mine?"

Yes, lad, I lie easy,  
I lie as lads would choose;  
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,  
Never ask me whose.

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Composition:

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### Is My Poem Explained?

What happens to us after we die? This basic question has plagued humankind for its entire existence. Religions have been created to explain it; people have spent endless hours philosophizing, wondering, and worrying about it. The mystery of death has haunted the collective human consciousness for so long for a simple reason-there is no right answer. We have no way of knowing what will happen to our family and friends, no way of knowing what happens in the world after we pass. "Is My Team Plowing" uses diction, rhyming, and a conversational tone as he ponders the subject of death and its impact on those we leave behind.

The poem takes the form of a conversation between two men: one who is dead, and the other, his former friend in life. The two men alternate by stanzas, with the dead man asking a question and then the living man answering. The transition between the different speakers is marked by a change in diction. "'Is my team plowing[?]" the dead man asks (Line 1). "Ay, the horses trample" the living man answers (5). The dead man always speaks inside quotation marks and refers to himself in the first person, while the living man does not use quotation marks and refers to the dead man in the second person "you" and himself in the first person. The living man also begins each of his stanzas with the affirmative "Ay" or, in the last line, simply "Yes" (28). These changes in diction distinctly mark where each speaker's dialog begins and ends.

The text uses a simple rhyming scheme which emphasizes the conversational tone.

Beginning with the second line of the first stanza, the second line of each stanza rhymes with the fourth line of the same stanza. The type of rhyme is not constant throughout the poem, but the consistency of the end rhymes enhances the diction and makes the text flow; it is almost easier to read. Masculine and approximate or slant rhymes are used specifically, but masculine is used the most. Masculine rhymes add a certain force or weight to the words, and the text uses this in conjunction with its fairly heavy subject matter to add to its seriousness. The rhymes in "Is My Team Plowing" act to enhance different parts of the poem's diction and tone by subtly adding meaning, weight, and a feeling of flow to the words.

The diction of the text indicates a number of facts about the poem itself and the two men who are speaking in it. The living man often uses the word "Ay," an informal word for yes. This indicates that they are either good friends, due to the informality, or not as educated. Also, throughout the poem, the words used are fairly simple and easy to understand, like "Ay." This, along with the title itself, would seem to indicate that these are fairly ordinary men. "Plowing" (1) is not exactly a meritorious profession by connotation and their talk of playing football (soccer) and other simple things add to their normal, everyday nature. This everyman viewpoint appeals to a wider variety of people, helping to make the text's message understandable to them. The poem and its diction are straightforward in their meaning, but in a way this makes the poem mean more by creating a situation that everyone can relate to.

The poem enters the philosophical conversation about death by taking the viewpoint of a dead man. The poem takes advantage of our fears about death and what will happen to the world after we are gone, and puts them in to paper in the form of a simple conversation. "Is My Team Plowing" uses diction, rhyming and this conversational tone to show what happened to one man after his death, and to answer, at least for that man, the question of what

happened to the world when he died; as all things do, it moved on.

Housman, A.E.. "Fire and Ice." *Perrines's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*. Eds. Greg

Johnson and Thomas R. Arp. Ninth ed. Boston, MA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2006. 674-

675. Print.

Name		Date	
Topic/Title			
Area	Score	Comments	
Ideas and Content	9		
Organization	9		
Word Choice	10		
Sentence Fluency	9		
Voice	9		
Lower Order Concerns	8		
Presentation (Research Guide)	10		
Insight	9		
Support	8		
Introduction and Conclusion	9		
TOTAL	90		
<b>GRADE out of 50</b>	<b>45</b>	You demonstrate a good understanding of the poem; the first body paragraph is very underdeveloped; see comments for revisions; revise LOCs	